

Closing Statements

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The topic of our Tenth Annual Conference, *Migrants and Refugees: the Challenge of Identity and Integration*, is an issue that is a concern not only to refugees and migrants but also to us all. The fast pace of globalization, the formation of regional blocks and the growing intertwining of their economies, together with the advancement of technology in communications and transportation, is making our world grow smaller and pushing our culture and societies closer. Identity and integration are important issues in the origins and outcomes of both forced and voluntary migration movements. It is a major issue for all parties involved: the migrants, the host community and the country of origin.

All of us are faced with the challenge of identity. Identity is what defines us, what each of us feels is closest to our hearts and homes and what makes us different from all the rest of the world. It is what makes us individuals. It is identity that enables us to relate to our communities, societies and country. And therefore it is valued, protected and preserved.

But what if your identity becomes a threat to yourself? There are times when it is because of your identity that you become a victim – a victim who might need to flee your own country for protection, because you cannot be free for to be who you are. Identity can also be a source of conflict – a conflict that can arise when the concept is misused and can often result in persecution or even war. During World War II we saw what happened to the Jews because of who they are – because of their identity.

However, the challenge does not lie only in identity, but also in integration. Whether it would be forced or voluntary migration, the matter of integration of both refugees and migrants needs to be addressed.

Integration is a long-term process in which successes and failures are measured through several generations. The challenge arises when the issue is dealt in a rigid uncompromising manner. “*They should adapt to us*,” is a familiar comment heard from the host community. They are unwilling to welcome a new group of people who do not share a history, culture, and religion. However, the migrants can be rigid as well. They tend to refuse to accept and adjust into the new society because they might not agree or understand the social, cultural, religious aspects of their host community. A successful integration can only take place on a mutual, reciprocal respect. Ignorance and lack of knowledge need to be managed by both sides.

The question of integration is of a complex nature. Integration means to be accepted the person that you are. It means to be given respect, equality, opportunities, and to live in freedom as the rest of the host community does. More often than we would like, many of us tend to concentrate on the differences rather than on the similarities. The fundamental criterion is that we are all human beings

– born free and equal in dignity and rights. It is essential to it, at all times. We can hope that with tolerance, openness, respect, understanding, and acceptance these differences will vanish and a world of freedom and equality can prevail.

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Aujourd'hui se termine la 10^{ème} Conférence annuelle organisée par Webster University, vouée au domaine humanitaire. Une fois encore, cette conférence nous a enrichis par la qualité de son contenu qui nous a été généreusement apporté par tous les intervenants, spécialistes, dévoués et volontaires.

Grâce à toutes ces personnes, une grande opportunité nous est offerte tant à nous étudiants qu'à toutes les personnes participant à notre conférence. Leur savoir et leurs témoignages nous apportent beaucoup. Pour avoir participé aux trois sessions précédentes, je suis en mesure de vous affirmer que chaque année un souffle nouveau contribue à son succès.

J'aimerais donc également remercier aussi bien Webster University pour son support, sa confiance et son intérêt apporté à ce projet chaque année, que les organisations internationales, comme le HCR, le CICR, OIM et les autres pour l'appui et l'encouragement de cette initiative depuis le début. Un merci particulier à tous les étudiants et personnes qui depuis des mois se sont engagées à participer à l'organisation des ces deux journées avec dévouement et détermination. Plus particulièrement et au nom de tous les étudiants de Webster, je désire transmettre toute ma gratitude au Professeur Hieronymi, sans qui tout ceci n'aurait pas lieu.

Merci à tous et à l'année prochaine !